

Jeffords announces \$500K for Batten Kill
Bennington Banner
By PATRICK G. RHEAUME

MANCHESTER -- After spending several hot weeks working on the federal budget in Congress, Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., visited a cool, shady hiding place Tuesday on the Batten Kill.

Too bad it was only for trout.

"What a great day," Jeffords said when he arrived. "It always turns out to be nice and sunny on visits to this river." The Senator quickly removed his sportcoat and started talking with conservation officials about the river.

"I used to try fishing sometimes when I was younger," Jeffords recalled. "I gave up because I never got any fish. But anyone who comes here for the first time won't have the same problem I did."

Jeffords made the trip to the town's water treatment pumping station to announce \$500,000 in grants, over this year and the next, which will help restore the river's trout habitat. Since 2000, Jeffords has secured nearly \$2 million for the Batten Kill.

This money will be used to complete a genetics and population survey of the brown trout and to restore the trout habitat by installing tree branches and roots in and around the river said Steve Roy, a fisheries biologist for the Green Mountain National Forest. The branches and roots will provide shade for the trout, which benefit from a cool environment.

"We're putting back into the stream things that should be there," said Gina Owens, a district ranger for the Forest Service. "These will help restore the diversity of the stream."

Jeffords was pleased to find money for the Batten Kill during a tough budget fight, during which spending cuts for health care and student loans were proposed.

"Obviously there was a lot of competition among those who feel very strongly about programs in their part of the country," he said. "We have a mandate to preserve the present for the future. ... Part of this means that we have an obligation to make sure that funds are there to stop the disappearance of trout. This project gives me a lot of hope about the future of the river and the community."

Jeffords added that the importance of the Batten Kill was apparent even to senators from other states. "The river's such a good story that it's not hard to sell, even in Washington, where sometimes they get things backwards," he said.

Cynthia Browning, executive director of the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, emphasized the value of local collaboration with federal projects.

"Every dollar that you send to us is multiplied by the work of volunteers," Browning told Jeffords. "When you're down in Washington, you can talk to members of Congress about project like these. ... There have been serious erosion spots on parts of this river that are smothering the trout. But everyone here has been working together to take care of this."

People involved with the river who came to the event tried to make the senator's visit enjoyable.

Shelly Stiles, district manager of the Bennington County Conservation District, let Jeffords borrow what she called a "Walloomsac River walking stick." The senator carried the walking stick, a 6-foot-long pole of white plastic, for the rest of his visit.

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Wayne Laroche said that the Batten Kill makes a good place to study trout populations because it has a steady flow, never getting too high or low.

"This is a very good case study to see if we can get results by adding areas of shade and cool for the trout," Laroche said. "This stream has the reputation of being a great place for trout. If we could build this back to what it was or what it could be, we'll have a great resource for everyone who likes the outdoors."